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ABSTRACT

The Ohio Department of Education estimates that 15,000 children were being home-schooled in Ohio, based on a 1991 survey of school superintendents. This document presents an overview of home schooling and describes the nature and extent of home schooling in Ohio. Data are based on a review of literature, information received from national and state home-schooling organizations, and interviews conducted with parents who home-school. The document addresses the following topics: the definition of home schooling; the requirements for home schooling in Ohio; the characteristics of families who engage in home schooling; the reasons why parents choose home schooling; a comparison of curricula and instructional practices used by home schools and conventional schools; the reported educational outcomes of home-schooled students; and the impact of home schooling on school districts. Home-schooling advocates report that home-schooled students perform as well as or better than their traditionally schooled counterparts on standardized tests and that they are socially competent at an earlier age than conventionally schooled peers. The document suggests that home schooling can alleviate some of the financial pressures and overcrowding in public school districts. Two exhibits are included. (Contains 26 references.) (LMI)

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What is Home Schooling?

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION OVERSIGHT
Columbus, Ohio
January, 1995

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The Legislative Office of Education Oversight (LOEO) serves as staff to the Legislative Committee on Education Oversight. Created by the General Assembly in 1989, the Office evaluates education-related activities funded wholly or in part by the state of Ohio. LOEO prepares research reports and information memos on topics selected by its Committee. Research reports provide conclusions and offer recommendations. Information memos are short descriptions of programs or issues.

WHAT IS HOME SCHOOLING?

Background

Home schooling--parents schooling their children at home--has existed in the United States since colonial America. However, for years children taught at home were treated as truant. Home schooling is now legal in every state.

Many states have voluntarily modified existing statutes to make home schooling legal. Other states have been forced to amend their laws after courts ruled that they were too vague regarding the circumstances under which home instruction was illegal. Thirty-four states have passed specific statutes and regulations regarding home schooling, and 29 require standardized testing for home-schooled students to ensure they are progressing appropriately. Efforts to "manage" home schooling through legislation have commonly centered on the regulation of the curriculum or the certification of the parents as teachers.

Although requirements for home schooling vary among states, the responsibility for enforcing the laws pertaining to home schooling is generally left to individual school districts. Litigation involving the local interpretation of state laws is ongoing in many states, including Ohio. Cases often involve school districts requiring more information from the home-school family than is permitted by law.

The national Home School Legal Defense Association and the National Home Education Research Institute estimate that the number of children taught at home in the United States has grown from 12,500 in the late 1970s to at least 700,000 in 1995. While current estimates represent only 1-1/2% of the nation's 50 million school-aged children, the dramatic increase has drawn the attention of the general public, educators, and policy makers. Some link the growing popularity of home schooling with the public demand for improved curriculum and instruction; others link it to the rise in religious fundamentalism.

The Ohio Department of Education estimates that 15,000 children are being home schooled in Ohio. This estimate is based on a 1991 survey of school superintendents. According to the national Home School Legal Defense Association and the National Home Education Research Institute, Ohio ranks fifth in the number of home-schooled children behind California, Texas, Michigan, and Virginia. Pennsylvania ranks sixth. These organizations project that nationally the number of home-schooled children will increase at a rate of 20% to 25% per year. If these estimates hold, Ohio could be home schooling 46,000 children by the year 2000.

Despite increasing numbers, many educators and public officials are not convinced of the merits of home schooling. Critics of the home-school movement are concerned that the "programs cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience" (National Education Association, 1989). They argue that children are deprived of proper socialization and that the requirements for home schooling, such as the education levels of parent-teachers, are too lenient. Home-school advocates believe that the education of children is primarily the responsibility and right of parents. They cite studies that show home-schooled children excel on standardized tests and tend to become socially competent at an earlier age than conventionally schooled peers. Advocates quote research showing no relationship between the education level of home-school parents and the educational achievement of their children.

Purpose

This memo describes the nature and extent of home schooling in Ohio. It does not draw conclusions or make recommendations for policy makers. The memo addresses the following questions:

1. What is home schooling?
2. What are the requirements for home schooling in Ohio?
3. What traits are common among home-schooling families?
4. Why are people choosing home schooling?
5. How are home-schooling curriculum and instruction different from the curriculum and instruction of conventional schools?
6. What are the reported education outcomes of home-schooled students compared with the outcomes of students in conventional schools?
7. What impact can home schooling have on school districts?

In order to answer these questions, LOEO staff reviewed journal articles and books and contacted national and state organizations pertaining to home schooling. LOEO obtained information from the Ohio Department of Education and from interviews with home-school parents.

1. What is home schooling?

Home schooling is defined as a learning situation wherein children spend the majority of the traditional school day in their home, in lieu of attending a conventional institution of education (Ray, 1989). Children are generally taught by their parents, however teaching responsibilities are sometimes shared among two or more families. Home schooling includes many of the same instructional methods used in conventional education, such as direct instruction, oral reading by the teacher and student, textbook directed instruction, and independent projects. However, the home environment can provide a more flexible schedule for daily lessons and a greater variety of learning situations.

Although this learning alternative is called "home" schooling, the children are not necessarily learning only at home. Field trips and community service are considered an integral part of home schooling. Children are encouraged to experience, first hand, places of interest and to volunteer their time to benefit people and organizations in their communities.

While parents or guardians are the prime educators of the children, it is common for home-schooled children to have significant interaction with adults and children outside their immediate families. For example, in one study 93% of home-schooled children participated in religious or Sunday school activities; 90% interacted with other home-schooled children; 88% interacted with neighborhood children; 50% participated in music activities; 48% in sports activities; 35% in public or private school functions; and 18% in neighborhood or community service organizations such as scouts (Rakestraw, 1987, 1988).

2. What are the requirements for home schooling in Ohio?

Education is compulsory in Ohio for children ages 5 through 18. School districts must ensure that school-aged children are receiving appropriate instruction. Ohio's home-schooling legislation, revised in 1989 (ORC 3321.04), requires parents to annually apply or give notice to the school district of their intention to home school. The Ohio Department of Education does not monitor the home-schooling application process

within school districts or the home-schooling process of individual families.

The legislation requires parents to specify to the district what curriculum, textbooks, or correspondence courses they intend to use and who will have the primary responsibility for instruction. Each child must receive at least 900 hours of instruction per year (the equivalent of 180 school days) from a person with a high school diploma or the demonstrated equivalent. Home instruction may be provided by a person who does not have a high school diploma if he or she is working under the direction of a person with a bachelor's degree.

To continue home schooling, academic progress must be demonstrated in specific subject areas. After each year of home schooling, parents must provide the superintendent with an academic report for each child being instructed at home. Academic progress can be demonstrated by taking a normed, standardized achievement test or by an alternative method agreed to by both the school district and parent, including an assessment by a certified teacher. Children who are tested must score at or above the 25th percentile, that is, at least as well as 25% of the students nationwide who took the same test.

Ohio's legislation specifies the process that superintendents must follow in accepting or denying an application or reapplication for home schooling. If an application is denied or revoked, a parent-teacher can appeal the decision to the juvenile court with jurisdiction. The superintendent is also required to determine the appropriate grade-level placement of a child who is re-enrolled into public school, regardless of whether re-enrollment is voluntary or due to the revocation of home schooling.

While Ohio's 1989 home-schooling legislation established a consistent statewide policy for the treatment of home schooling by individual school districts, there are many details that the legislation does not cover. Examples of issues that the current legislation does not address include: home instruction by persons convicted of child abuse; part-time enrollment in public schools of home-schooled students; minimum requirements for home-schooled students to graduate with a high school diploma; participation by home-schooled students in the extracurricular activities of public schools; and credit for home instruction during an expulsion.

3. What traits are common among home-school families?

Results from studies of home schooling in other states (Alabama, Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington) have been useful in developing a profile of home-schooled students and their families. Exhibit 1 is a compilation of the most common characteristics of home-schooling families.

Exhibit 1

Characteristics of Home-School Families

- Home-schooled children are 50% male and 50% female. They range from 4 to 17 years of age; 70% are 9 to 12 years old.
- Both parents are actively involved in the home school. The mother is the teacher most of the time.
- Parents have attended or graduated from college. The average education level is three years of college.
- Total household income is $20,000 to $30,000 per year. Occupations of the main wage earner range from professional to blue-collar with the most common occupations being engineer, business manager, salesperson, and minister.
- Three children are in the family.
- Over 70% regularly attend religious services with a variety of religious backgrounds being represented.
- Formal instruction begins at an average age of 5-1/2.
- Children are formally "schooled" three to four hours per day, and often spend additional time in individual learning endeavors.
- Children study a wide range of conventional subjects, with an emphasis on math, reading, and science.
- The learning program is flexible and highly individualized, involving both purchased materials and materials prepared by the parents.

(Ray, 1989)

4. Why are people choosing home schooling?

While parents who home school their children have many characteristics in common, they are a diverse group when it comes to reasons for their decision to home school. Exhibit 2 shows reasons given by parents for home schooling.

Many parents home school because they believe that they can provide a better academic foundation for their children than the public school system. They believe that they can provide learning experiences not available in public schools because of financial constraints within the school system (Colfax, 1988). These parents are concerned about the learning environment in conventional classrooms: the lack of individual attention and the substitution of structure and regimentation for individual exploration and natural learning (Holt, 1981). They are concerned about the exposure of their children to health risks and violence.

Some parents home school their children primarily for religious or ideological reasons. Home schooling allows these parents a means to actively preserve ideologies, values, and practices by which to

live. Some believe home schooling promotes family unity. Parents who home school for religious reasons are concerned about the lack of emphasis on moral issues in conventional schools. They believe that respect for persons and properties, empathy, and self-control must be taught directly. Without an emphasis on moral instruction they believe children are learning "immorality" (Williamson, 1989).

Exhibit 2

Reasons Parents Home School Their Children

- **Parents want to help their children develop social skills without negative peer influences.**
- **Parents have a desire to control the content of instructional material used by their children.**
- **They wish to preserve their children's natural curiosity and love of learning.**
- **Parents want to be the ones to provide the discipline their children need.**
- **They desire their children to have more religious freedom in their education; to instill spiritual and moral values in their children.**
- **Parents want their children to have a warm and secure environment that provides a variety of rich educational experiences.**
- **They do not want their children exposed to drugs, alcohol, or violence.**
- **Parents want a learning environment based on cooperation instead of competition.**

(Rakestraw, 1988)

Home-schooling parents also have identified disadvantages to home schooling. The most frequently cited is the time commitment involved. Less frequently mentioned disadvantages are: the social isolation of some children, the expense of schooling, the lack of particular amenities of conventional schools, the disapproval of neighbors and relatives, and legal problems obtaining permission to home school (Gustafson, 1989).

5. How are home-schooling curriculum and instruction different from conventional schools?

Curriculum subject areas required for home schooling are comparable to those included in the Ohio Department of Education's 1983 Minimum Standards for Elementary and Secondary Schools. According to Ohio Administrative Code 3301.34.01-06, a home-schooling curriculum must include: (a) language, reading, spelling, and writing; (b) geography, history of the U.S. and Ohio, national, state, and local government; (c) math; (d) science; (e) health; (f) physical education; (g) fine arts and music; (h) first aid, safety, and fire prevention. Home schooling is not required to include "any concept, topic, or practice that is in conflict with the sincerely held religious beliefs of the parent."

Home-school students advance from one grade level to the next after successfully

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completing the course of study described in their annual application to the school district. Many home-school students are tested for competency in subject areas just as their conventionally schooled peers. Ohio's home-schooling legislation does not specifically address the circumstances under which a home-schooled student may receive a high-school diploma. Some previously home-schooled students may enroll in high school and take the Ninth-Grade Proficiency Test in order to receive a diploma. Others may seek an Ohio Certificate of High School Equivalence through the General Education Development (GED) test.

Much of the instructional material used in home schooling is prepared by the parents themselves. Supplemental materials are often purchased from the large number of home-school supply companies. One study on home schooling reported that parents spent $280 per year to purchase commercially prepared materials (Rakestraw, 1988). A strong system of support networks and advocacy groups enable parent-teachers to share instructional materials and information about successful lessons and educational activities.

Many parents argue against the use of prepackaged curriculums that have been developed for the home-schooling market. They contend that these materials merely mimic public school curriculums and are "rigid, age-graded, and test-oriented" (Colfax, 1988). They assert that prepackaged materials foster a dependency on the materials that is unhealthy and inhibits the creativity and critical thinking necessary to meet the individual needs of children.

There is little research available comparing instruction in a home-school environment with that in a conventional classroom setting. It is likely that some differences in instruction are directly related to the reasons parents choose to home school. For example, conventional instruction is limited to the length of the school day and the length of the school year. Instruction in a home school can occur anytime throughout the day or be expanded to fill a whole day and can be extended through the summer months.

Child development experts assert that "an important part of the educational effectiveness of home schooling is the proved tutorial method that it embodies" (Whitehead & Bird, 1984). The tutorial method is reported to be superior to group instruction because this method gives children a greater opportunity to obtain answers to their questions (Moore, 1984). Studies done by the Hewitt Research Foundation have found that the average child will receive from one to three personal responses a day from an adult in a conventional school classroom. In a home-school environment, the average child will receive from 100 to 300 personal responses daily.

6. What are the reported education outcomes of home-schooled students?

The national Home School Legal Defense Association and the Home School Research Institute report that home-schooled students average between the 65th and 80th percentiles on normed, standardized achievement tests, while the national average is at the 50th percentile. Results from the spring 1994, nationwide administration of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills provided by the testing company, show that 80% of home-schooled children across all age groups achieved individual scores above the national average, compared to 50% of the conventional school population. Moreover, 55% of home-schooled children achieved individual scores in the top quarter of the students who took the test.

Research reported in the Home School Researcher, a quarterly publication of home-schooling research, indicates that home-schooled students do as well or better than their conventionally schooled peers in terms of academic achievement. One Texas study compared the scores of students on a series of tasks to measure reasoning ability; the scores of home-schooled students far surpassed the national average (Quine, 1989). The findings of an Alabama study demonstrated that "home-schooled children performed at comparable levels to the public schooled children at each grade level" (Rakestraw, 1988).

Results from the Alabama study also show that "home-schooled boys and girls performed comparably to one another on the standardized achievement tests." Further, "[t]he level of education of the parent-teacher did not affect the performance of the children on the tests... the home-schooled children whose parent-teachers were not certified to teach, performed as well on the standardized achievement tests as those whose parent-teachers were certified to teach."

There is research to support the assertion that home-schooled children become socially competent and socially responsible at an earlier age than most of their conventionally schooled peers. Sociability, according to child development experts, is linked with self-confidence, self-respect, and self-worth. Several studies have demonstrated significant advantages to students educated at home in terms of more developed levels of self-confidence and leadership abilities (Taylor, 1986; Ray, 1988; Montgomery, 1989).

Being home schooled does not seem to be a disadvantage for students seeking admission to college. Over 150 colleges and universities in the United States are actively recruiting home-schooled students. According to the national Home School Defense Association and the Ohio Department of Education, colleges seek home-schooled students because they read with comprehension, have a wealth of different educational experiences, know how to access and use information, and have an enthusiasm for learning.

Information released in 1990 by the National Home Education Research Institute indicated that of the home-schooled students sampled, 33% attended a four-year college after completing home schooling and 17% attended a two-year college. An additional 17% went on to higher education after waiting a year, 12% were engaged in full-time employment, and the remaining 21% pursued other activities. The National Center for Education Statistics reported comparable 1990 statistics for high-school graduates.

7. What impact can home schooling have on school districts?

While education is a public issue and a primary concern of governments, courts generally have upheld that parents have the right to educate their children at home. Much of the opposition to home schooling comes from educators and education administrators. Although they are not singularly opposed to home schooling, educators believe it is difficult to maintain the structure and broad curriculum necessary for students to achieve academically in a home-school environment. Educators assert that parents often become overwhelmed over time and return their children to the public schools. A portion of these students come back to public schools without sufficient preparation to perform grade-level school work.

Schools contend that while they are ultimately responsible for the education of school-aged children in their district, they

are not permitted to monitor or supervise home-school programs. As a result, some educators continue to discourage home schooling in their districts. Other educators view the increase in home-schooling families as an opportunity to more actively involve parents in the education of their children and have initiated cooperative programs to that effect.

Through cooperative programs, "home-schooled children may gain things from conventional schools that are not available to them at home, parent-teachers might learn from professional educators and vice versa, conventional schools may gain from the talents of home-schooled children, and public schools may receive tax monies due to... enrollment of home-schooled children" (Ray, 1989).

Home schooling can provide some remedy for classroom overcrowding and in extreme instances can alleviate the expense of building new schools. School districts with large numbers of home-schooled students, however, could lose substantial amounts of financial support from the state due to the loss of full-time students, although home-schooled students who attend public schools on a part-time basis may be included, pro rata, in districts' average daily membership. Children who primarily learn outside the school require less overhead.

School finance proposals such as tuition tax credits, school vouchers, and property tax rebates for families who home-school could further decrease state education funds available to some school districts. Conversely, financial incentives could enable more parents to educate their children at home.

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